George, Isolde, etc. Chapter XV

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Isolde and George hear voices, and Isolde makes sauteed fish (recipe included) sorry - no sex

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Chapter XV

They were all sitting at the breakfast table, having a second cup of coffee, when Isolde spoke up. “I have an idea,” she said. “On those nights when I don’t feel like shutting one of you out, would you both mind coming to my bed with me, and just snuggling, and going to sleep that way?”

George and Terry looked at each other. “I’m game, if you are,” Terry said.

“Okay,” George said. “We can give it a try.” He wanted to say that things might be moving a little too fast, but he thought about the previous night, and felt so warm and loving toward Isolde that he would have signed on for sodomy on Sunday if she had asked him just then.

“ I got everything out of the house yesterday, except the spare VW engine,” he then said. “Terry, do you think if we put some old feed bags in the back of your Jeep, we could haul it over today? I’d like to get the place completely empty before the first of September, then I wouldn’t have to renew the lease.”

“That sounds like a plan,” Terry replied.

Isolde said, “George, can I borrow your keys? I want to call Enterprise and return the rental car today, but I don’t want to be stuck here without any wheels, in case I need to run any errands.”

“Sure,” George said, “if you trust it not to break.”

Isolde laughed, and then said, “I’ll take my chances. And if it does, I can always call you guys to come rescue me.”

“Here’s a spare key to the Jeep,” said Terry. “Since you have George’s keys too, why don’t you stop somewhere in your travels and get a couple more made, so we will each have keys to both vehicles, I

mean, if that’s all right with you, George.”

“I think that’s a great idea,” George replied. “Once we get settled in, working at the park, we will only need to take one car to work, and Isolde can use the other. It seems foolish to buy a third car, when we will soon have your truck, anyway. We ought to be able to manage for a week or so till I get finished at Fred’s.”

“Oh, that reminds me,” said Isolde. “Fred called yesterday morning, and said that the parts you were waiting for came in.”

“Good,” George said. “Now I can finish the Maserati.”

“Did he say how much they were?”

“He sure did,” Isolde laughed. “He bent my ear for about fifteen minutes fussing about the distributor cap and rotor costing $350.00.”

“$350.00?” exclaimed Terry, “What’s it made of, gold?”

“No.” George said, “but it has two coil terminals, and twelve spark plug terminals, and the inside has connections at two different levels, for the dual ignition. It’s pretty complicated.”

“Wow,” was all Terry said.

While George and Terry went to get the VW engine, Isolde called The temp service, and asked if they had anything for her. They asked her to come back to the place on Riva Road for the next two weeks, but didn’t know what was happening after that. She didn’t tell them that after that, she hoped to be working in Easton.

As soon she hung up the phone, it rang. It was Bob. “I have an idea,” Bob said. “George told me you are working as a temp, and I need someone in the real estate office to cover while my regular secretary is out on maternity leave. Would you be interested in doing that?”

“How soon do you need me?” Isolde asked. “I just told the agency that I could work in Annapolis for the next two weeks.”

“Well, she hasn’t taken off yet, but she’s pretty big, so I think it’s gonna be soon. She told me yesterday that she had an ultrasound on Saturday, and the baby is a breach. So she’s gonna schedule a Cesarean. I’m guessing that two weeks will probably work out about right.”

“Well, let’s tentatively plan it that way then. But if things hit the fan, let me know. I think I can get out of the temp thing without notice, if I have to. Besides, if I’m gonna be working for you for the next ten years, don’t care if they give me a bad reference or not.”

“That’s the spirit,” Bob said. “Grab that ring and hold onto it for dear life.”

Isolde laughed, “Goodbye, Bob,” she said, and hung up the phone.

Then she called Dan and Will, and got answering machines at both their houses. She left messages to set them up for a rehearsal with George and Terry for the next Saturday.

Gathering up The Clockwinder, and another cup of coffee, she made her way down the steps to the river. She walked over to the water’s edge, and was about to put her toe in when she saw it was full of jellyfish. Well – it is the end of August, she thought to herself. She went over to the picnic table, and sat down to read. When she got to the part where Elizabeth put the marbles in her mouth, she laughed out loud.

“What are you laughing at?” George asked. He and Terry had gotten back with the engine, and he had come looking for Isolde.

“You will have to read it for yourself. It won’t be nearly so funny if I just tell you about it, “ she replied. “Did you get the spare motor?”

“We stashed it under the porch. Terry’s gone back to the farm to get the snow fence. We’re gonna make the crab pound today, and then tomorrow, he’s gonna bale hay and I’m gonna go back to work. I called in to Fred for Thursday, and got permission to take off to get the bales picked up and into the barn. Can you help us Thursday?”

“I’m off until Monday, and then I’m back at Riva Road for two weeks. After that, I might be helping Bob at his real estate office.”

“Great! You’re going to be in Easton sooner than I am, it looks like. That reminds me – I was sorta thinking about working Saturday and Sunday, to see if I can get that Masi done a little sooner.”

“Well, forget Saturday. If Dan and Will can make it, you and Terry have a rehearsal here on Saturday afternoon. I thought we could catch a mess of crabs, in the morning and have a little celebration with them on Saturday night. And you and Terry can tell them about the permanent gig. I wonder if either of them has any mechanical ability.”

“Jumped right into that manager business, did you? Anyway, I don’t know about mechanical ability, but Will has a commercial driver’s license. He drives a cab part time. I don’t know if it will allow him to drive Bob’s shuttle bus, though.”

“We’ll have to ask them – I ‘spose it’ll all come out in the course of conversation, though on Saturday. What about Dan?”

“You know it’s funny. You work on gigs with guys for years, and never find out what their day jobs really are. I think Dan’s a CPA, but I’m not sure. I know he went to college at University of Baltimore, but we just never talked about that.”

“Well, I doubt we’re going to be rolling in so much dough that we’ll need an accountant. At least not for a while,” Isolde said.

“Isolde, I’ve been thinking. Things are moving a little too fast for me here. I mean, you spent one night with Terry, and last night with me, and I don’t know if I am ready to accept all that just yet, and this morning you suggested we all sleep together. Do you mind terribly if we wade into the shallow end of this pool, instead of leaping into the deep end from the three meter platform?”

“I wondered if you were going to have second thoughts, when you agreed so readily this morning. No, I don’t mind. I know this has to be terribly difficult for you, and I don’t want you to be hurt. I meant it when I said I love you, George, but I also meant it when I said I love Terry. This isn’t easy for me, either. Actually, I suppose it’s easiest for Terry, since he doesn’t know either of us as well as we know each other.”

“I do genuinely like him, but I just need more time to get used to sharing, is all. It’s one thing to individually be with you, but it’s entirely another to be with you together. I still feel a little strained when we are up and about, and I don’t know how I will deal with sleeping together. Also, after last night, I don’t think I can go to bed with you without … well, you know …Let’s face it. All I want to do right now is jump your bones.”

“That was pretty good, wasn’t it? I like the idea of you jumping my bones. Com’ere.” She stood up, and taking his hand, started back toward the house.

When Terry got back with the fence, George and Isolde were nowhere in sight. He rolled the fencing down to the water’s edge, and found Isolde’s unfinished coffee and her book sitting on the picnic table. Putting two and two together, he smiled to himself as he began shaping the pound into a large rectangle.

After Terry had been working on the pound for about an hour, he decided to go up to the kitchen, to see if there was any coffee left. George and Isolde came down the stairs as he was pouring the last of it into a glass, along with some ice cubes. They were both grinning like the cat that got into the cream.

“Look at you two,”he said.”You’ve been sinning.”

Isolde laughed. “Guilty as charged, Your Honor,”she replied.

“Well, I hope you didn’t wear George out too much to help me finish putting the pound together.”

“Actually, I think what she did was rejuvenate me,” said George. “But first, I need a drink of something cold and wet. Do we have any OJ?”

“If you can wait a few minutes, I can make a quart of Instant Iced tea, “ Isolde offered.

“Okay, thanks. While you do that, I’ll go get your stuff from the picnic table,” George replied. As he went out onto the front porch, he was whistling *What A Difference A Day Makes*.

Terry walked across the kitchen and put his arm around Isolde’s waist. “I take it, my arriving on the scene has put the spark back into your love life.”

“It’s funny, but there never was a spark until you came along. Oh, we used to screw now and again, but it wasn’t as if we ever were at the stage where we could not keep our hands off each other. I don’t think we’ve ever decided to go make love in the middle of the day like that, before. And don’t you tell him I told you, but he always used to come so quickly, that it really wasn’t very satisfying for me. I don’t know what’s come over him, but last night, and again today, he has been like a changed person. And I am too. I feel like a wanton hussy. All I have thought about for the past four days is sex, and I just can’t get enough of it.”

“I like that you can’t,” said Terry. “Maybe, between the two of us, we can keep you in a constant state of arousal.”

“I can do that myself,” Isolde laughed. “It’s all in your head, anyway. I mean, even the dumpiest person can be sexy if she has the proper attitude. What was it Yogi Berra once said? I think it was something like ‘ninety percent of it is all mental, and the rest is in your head’.”

Terry laughed. “He sure had a way with words. Just what way, I’m not sure, but some of the funniest

stuff came out of his mouth.”

As George was climbing the stairs back to the house, a limerick popped into his head.

We are a family of three

She has sex with both Terry and me

But not both at once, ‘cause she ain’t no dunce.

It’s all individually.

That’s odd, he thought to himself. I never think of limericks. I wonder what caused it? I’ll have to tell Isolde. I hope she doesn’t think I’m trying to usurp her position of poet laureate or anything.

After they all had a glass of iced tea, George and Terry went back down to the pier. They had the pound about the right size and shape, and were walking up to the house, when Isolde appeared on the front porch, with a fishing rod and tackle and a paper cup of bloodworms. “While you guys work on the pound, I’m gonna see what’s for supper,” she said.

“It’s usually pretty poor fishing from the shore, “ Terry said, “And we’re gonna need the canoe for sinking the poles for the outer portion of the pound.”

“Oh, that’s all right, “ she replied. “I found a plastic laundry basket and I’m gonna stick it on my air mattress with some duct tape. I can put whatever I catch in that, and by sitting astride the air mattress, I can paddle out past all the seaweed and stuff. Should I use a double bottom rig for fishing here? I’ve never fished the Magothy; only the bay when Grandpa Stoltzfus used to take me.”

“Some people use a bottom rig here, but I think mostly what they’re doing is feeding the crabs.” Terry replied. “I like to use a cork pencil bobber, and keep the bait about two or three feet below the surface. Except in the channel most of the river is only about four or five feet deep, and if you get the bait too low, you’ll be back down in crab and seaweed territory.”

“Okay,” Isolde said. “I’ll take your advice and rig it with a short standoff, a foot or two above the sinker.”

Terry and George had finished the pound, and were scooping up doublers with the nets when Isolde paddled back into shore. She hadn’t had as much luck as she’d hoped to, but she did have two nice-sized stripers, that she thought would make good fillets.

She decided to try something a little different with dinner. So she looked in her copy of Fannie Farmer, but found nothing that struck her fancy. She was about to grab Joy of Cooking from the shelf, when she spied a little homemade booklet of recipes that George had said was his mother's. Well, she thought to herself, I'm certainly not going to be, or compete with his mom, but let's see if there's anything in here for inspiration. She started leafing through it for ideas. As she did, she found herself feeling almost as if George's mother (who had died long before Isolde met Gorge) was looking over her shoulder.

A voice behind her said, "Look for the sautéed fish recipe."

Isolde, startled, whirled around, but there was no one there. I must be getting senile, she thought. First its voices, then next thing you know, it's falling asleep in the middle of conversations.

She pulled out a chair, and sat down at the table, with the little recipe booklet in front of her. She turned the yellowing and brittle pages one at a time. Each page contained one recipe, very neatly hand written in ink. She leafed through Charlie's Cheesecake, Hungarian Goulash, Bob's Steamed Crabs with Beer, Lydia's English Meat Pie, Grandma's Blackberry Jelly with a marginal note,"people prefer raspberries and ½ the sugar."

Then she found it. The recipe was simply labeled "Tabitha's Sautéed Fish." Immediately, Isolde thought, This is IT.

TABITHA'S SAUTEED FISH

4 tomatoes, peeled (dip 10 sec. in scalding hot water, then plunge into ice water to stop cooking. Peel with very sharp knife) Dice into ¼" cubes

1 Lime – peel, section, remove seeds, dice into ¼" cubes – squeeze all juice from peels

4 Fish Fillets, two w/skin on, and two fillets without skins – brush all with heavy whipping cream (NO SUBSTITUTES!)

Pre-heat a heavy skillet w/oil – heat to shimmer, but not smoking

Dip fish in flour and place in pan, bone side down

Approx. 1 minute per side – WATCH CAREFULLY!

Alternate the boneless and skinless pieces on a platter, bone side down (skin side up)

Wipe out pan w/ paper towel

Place 3T butter in pan – unsalted is best – brown slightly

Add 2 or 3 T small capers, 1 bunch chopped spring onions, the tomatoes and limes, 1T parsley and 1T chives – heat til warmed, but not mushy – place on top of skinned pieces only – not on skins – KEEP SKINS CRISP!

Serve w/Vigonier – medium chilled (approx. 45 degrees)

Being the independent soul she was, Isolde hardly ever followed recipes to the letter. She did not like to feel hide-bound and uncreative while cooking, so she cooked by smell. She would smell whatever it was she was preparing, and then start opening and sniffing herbs and spices until she found something that smelled like it belonged in the pot. That was how she discovered that fennel works really well in marinara sauce, and how she discovered cumin, with hot sauce and ketchup, is good on a scrambled egg sandwich.

But this time, something told her to follow the recipe exactly. “Maybe it’s Geroge’s Mom,” she said to herself.

When George and Terry came in from working on the pound, she sent Terry to the store with directions to get two bottles of wine. “Vigonier,” she said.”Try to find some from either Chile or Argentina. That will be just as good as French, and much cheaper.”

George wondered how she knew that, but supposed she must have read it or heard it from the wine guys on the public radio station out of Baltimore.

Isolde sent George outside to clean the fish, with instructions to filet them, but leave the bones and skin on ½ of each one. “Just make four filets,” she said. “That will be enough for this recipe.”

I wonder what recipe, George thought to himself. She never has followed a recipe before. But he didn’t ask; instead, he dutifully carried the bucket of fish around to the garbage cans and began the job of cleaning them. While George was cleaning the fish, he let his mind review the events of the past couple of days.

He thought about how well he and Terry had worked together, each of them instinctively knowing what was needed and just when to jump in and help the other. He suddenly realized that he really

liked Terry. And he liked having a male friend to whom he could talk about more important things than just weather, or who was going to play in the World Series. Geroge had never had much interest in professional sports, and was never comfortable when the conversation turned to baseball or football, as it invariably did whenever he was around a bunch of guys.

He thought about Isolde wanting to sleep with both him and Terry in the bed, and was suddenly surprised to hear his mother's voice behind him say, "You both love her, and you like each other, so why not both of you cuddle her at once? Think how safe, secure, protected, and loved that would make her feel."

He whirled around, expecting to see someone, but there was no one there. Well, he thought, That's odd. I could have sworn Mom just told me to go with Isolde's idea of all of us sleeping together.
As always, he saved the heads, tail, fins and entrails to feed to the crabs.

Meanwhile, Isolde was rattling pots and pans in the kitchen. While she was waiting for the water to boil, she ran her paring knife across the steel a few times, just as she had watched her Grandpa Stoltzfus do, so many years ago.

Then she put fresh food and water in the mouse cage. The mouse sat still on his wheel, nothing moving except his whiskers. Well. She thought, At least he's not trying to run away anymore. Maybe, in another couple of months, he'll really figure out we aren't going to hurt him. I wonder why George has started calling him Jeffery? I'll have to ask him.

She checked the pot again, but it wasn't boiling yet and she thought, Well, Silly, a watched pot, and all that.

"Never boils," she heard a voice say, and whirled around again, but still there was no one. "This is getting eerie," she said aloud, just as George was coming in with the fish.

"I'm weary, too," said George.

"Not weary. Eerie," said Isolde.

"What is?"

"Well, I decided to do something different with the fish tonight," Isolde said, "and took your mom's book of recipes down to see what I could find, and I keep hearing this voice, telling me what to do."

"Which book?" George asked brightly.

“This one.” Isolde showed him the homemade pamphlet with the pages folded in half, and stapled together at the center, like a magazine.

“Oh, that,” said George. “My mom hardly ever used it. She said the recipes were old family recipes and reminded her too much of when my dad was around.”

“Well, “ Isolde said, “I keep hearing this voice telling me what to do.”

“That is too weird, “ said George. “While I was cleaning the fish, I could have sworn I heard my mom talking to me.”

“What did she say?” inquired Isolde.

“She told me I should just go with the flow, and if you want to sleep with both me and Terry at once, I should do it.”

“Does that mean you’ve changed your mind?” Isolde asked. She hoped she didn’t sound too eager.

“Yeah, I’ll give it a try.” George said, and then quickly added, “but don’t sound so eager.” He grinned then, and his eyes twinkled with mirth.

Isolde dropped the dishtowel she had been holding and threw her arms around him and said, “Oh George, I never could hide anything from you, could I? I just love you so much.”

She kissed him then, long and deeply, her tongue searching for his.

Terry came in, and seeing them kissing said, “If you two are gonna go hop in bed again, I make no guarantees about how much of this wine will be left when you come back downstairs.”

Isolde and George both laughed, and George said, “Com’ere, Fool. You need a hug too.”

“Lemme set the wine down. I got some asparagus, too,” replied Terry.

They all three embraced then, and Isolde was so happy she thought her heart would burst.She felt her eyes begin to water and she blinked twice, hard, trying not to cry. Acting almost as one, Geroge and Terry each raised a hand, and brushed the tears from her cheeks.

“All right you two,” Isolde said, as she broke away from their embrace. “Enough of this. You go get

cleaned up while I fix dinner.”

“We can’t both shower at once, “Geroge started to say. He was going to add, “and we’re not showering together,” but Terry interrupted him.

“Yes we can. When Gramps and I put the plumbing in, we used all 2 inch pipe. You could flush the toilet in the same bathroom while someone was showering, and they’d never know it.”

“Wow!” Geroge said. “That’s nice. It shows a lot of foresight.”

“Well, when we were doing the job, it only meant about 10% more in the cost of plumbing materials, and added nothing to our labor, so we decided to go with it,” Terry said.

“This asparagus is beautiful!” Isolde exclaimed. “Did you grow it?”

“No,” Terry replied. “Making the bed is just too much work. So I grabbed a dozen ears of corn at the farm, and some zucchini, and traded with the guy over on Mountain Road. He has a small backhoe on his tractor, and uses that to dig his asparagus beds.”

“ When I was a kid, I helped Grandpa put one in. It was a lot of work, and I was real disappointed when we didn’t get any asparagus until two years later,” Isolde replied.

“Why not?” George wanted to know.

“You explain, Terry, while I start on this stuff,” she said.

So, as they were walking down the hall, Terry explained. “Well, first you dig a trench about two feet deep. Then you put an even layer of rock salt in it, to kill all the weeds. About four inches thick. Then you have to sift all the weeds out of the soil from the trench, and put about half a foot of soil on top of the salt. Then you set the asparagus roots in the trench, and fill it back in. All that has to be done in late August or early September. The next Summer, the asparagus comes up, but if you cut any of that first growth, it will kill the roots, so you only get enough to thin the plants to about two inches apart. The next year you can start cutting, but you still have to leave one stalk on each plant. The next two years, you can cut all that grows, but after that the beds are done, and you have to start over. And you can’t start over in the same place, either. The salt and the asparagus rob all the nutrients from the soil, and it needs to rest with just lime and manure and a legume like clover or soybeans. Soybeans are better,” he added.

"Interesting," George said. “Well, since my bedroom’s upstairs, I’d better get my ass up there.”

“Yup. I gotta get cleaned up too,” said Terry.

When George and Terry arrived back in the kitchen, Isolde was just plating the fish.

“Smells great,” George remarked. “That recipe of mom’s must be a good one.”

“Terry, do you mind doing the wine?” Isolde asked. “I put both bottles in the freezer to chill them.”

“I’m gonna put this second bottle up in the fridge,” Terry said, “before we make wine-cicles.”

“I believe if James Bond were here, he’d say ‘chilled, not frozen’,” George quipped.

They all sat down then, and Terry looked at the platter of fish quizzically. Isolde had arranged the fish so that each fillet was laying flat on the plate. Two of them had their beautifully browned skins up, and the other two were in the center, covered in the tomato, lime and caper sauce. She had sprinkled parsley over all, and had laid several parsley garnishes around the edges.
The asparagus, she had placed on each individual plate. Looking at Terry’s expression, Isolde had a sudden sinking feeling that she had done something wrong. Maybe he doesn’t like parsley, she thought. Aloud, she said, “What’s wrong, Terry? If you don’t like parsley, I’ll fix you something else.”

“No, no. It isn’t that, “ Terry said. “It’s just that this looks and smells exactly like the way Grandma – Bob’s wife used to fix it. She said it was her sister, Tabitha’s recipe.”

Isolde looked at George, and George looked at Isolde. He opened his mouth, as if to say something, then closed it again.

Isolde blinked, then said, “I found it in a little home-made booklet of recipes that came from George’s mother. Here, I’ll show you.” She got up, and picked the booklet off the kitchen counter, where she had left it open while she was following the recipe.

Terry looked at it and said to George, “I wonder how your mom got Aunt Tabitha’s recipe.”

“I dunno, “ said George. “I guess it falls under the category of small world, huh?”

After dinner, they took the second bottle of wine out onto the porch.

“That meal was really good, Isolde. George said you were a good cook, and I didn’t disbelieve him, but I also didn’t know what kind of food he considered good.”

George laughed and said, “Yeah. For all you knew I might have liked boiled okra and bacon.”

“Now, that would have been hard to take, “ said Terry.

“Well, I can’t really take credit for the meal,” Isolde said, and went on, “All I did was follow the recipe.”